



eCGAP Focus Group

Date: Tuesday, Aug.2, 2005
Time: 9 a.m. to 11 a.m.
Location: Rockledge 1, Room 2198
Moderator: Jennifer Flach

Next Meeting: Monday, Aug. 15, 1:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m., Rockledge 1, Room 2198

Action items

1. (Communications office) Incorporate message to applicants/Service Providers to “Submit Early” in future communications.
2. (JJ Maurer) Suggest to Grants.gov that there be a site identifier in the 424RR application indicating from where the application was sent
3. (Communications office) Communicate to SBIR/STTR community that PIs and SOs need to have separate accounts in Commons
4. (Sara Silver) Add to requirements that AIDS related grant applications need to be flagged in the system.
5. (Sara Silver) Find out from Daniel Fox whether the capability for reviewers to use the IAR to print on demand is on the list of planned IAR enhancements
6. (Sara Silver) Add to requirements that List of Publications and Inclusion Enrolment Report pages should be bookmarked and listed separately in the Table of Contents.
7. (Jennifer Flach) Find out status of the NIH Guide Notice for the Dec. 1 receipt date.
8. (Jennifer Flach) Check if slides from the last Grants.gov Stakeholders’ meeting are available online because some information regarding volume handling was detailed at that meeting.

Overview of architecture changes to handle volume

JJ Maurer

Jennifer Flach noted that even though the Center for Scientific Review’s goal has changed for ramping up the volume of grant applications for the Oct. /Nov. receipt date, eRA is moving ahead with changes to architecture as planned. eRA needs to gear up its system anyway for receiving an estimated 2,500 SBIR/STTR applications through Grants.gov for the Dec. 1 receipt date.

JJ Maurer noted that given the original goal of 1,000 applications for that receipt cycle, eRA conducted an analysis over the last two weeks and came up with an architecture plan that can be implemented quickly.

The plan involves:

- Activating a standby server that enhances processing power by adding four more Central Processing Units and 8 gigabytes, thereby doubling available memory to 16 gigabytes (In the past, eCGAP has used one server with four CPUs and 8 gigabytes of memory).

- Adding redundancy, meaning that if one machine fails, another automatically picks up so there is no interruption of service.
- Redirecting applications to a shared Storage Area Network, thereby increasing storage capacity.

JJ said he had analyzed processing data from the June/July receipt cycle and had come up with some interesting findings:

- The image size is 3 megabytes.
- The actual size is 9 megabytes, factoring in the duplicate sections of the application that are stored for speed and archiving.
- The size of the actual application message package ranged from 3 megabytes to 14.5 megabytes, averaging 3 megabytes.
- The end-to-end processing time took about 45 seconds. A look at the logs revealed that it took about 15 to 20 seconds for an application that failed while it took up to three minutes for a large application that was saved.

JJ said that one concern about the validation server is that if people get used to a 20-40 second response, higher volumes of applications could lead to a longer response time for applicants unaccustomed to the wait. Another issue is that applicants are using the submission service to validate their applications. Between May and June there were 240 submissions and 340 hits against the validation servers.

Yet another issue is that while some Service Providers submit early in the process, other Service Providers resubmit at the last minute, sometimes resubmitting six times in the last hour because they have noticed something is wrong with their application. eRA deals with the duplicates by replacing one with the other but it still means that eRA has to process each of the six applications in the last hour. Jennifer noted that the message to “Submit Early” will be incorporated in future communications. Overall, JJ estimated that the system is ready to handle greater volumes.

(Communications office) Incorporate message to applicants/Service Providers to “Submit early” in future communications.

Q. This is an analysis of the eCGAP Process. How will these time estimates line up with Grants.gov providing the data feed?

A. JJ said he did not anticipate much difference in handling between the two processes. eRA will get the list of submissions from Grants.gov and start pulling the applications up; if some get backed up, he estimated it could take anywhere from three to five minutes. He noted that the XML structure is different and there is a different set of software that processes the 424RR, but the validations are almost identical as is the process. The bandwidth of Grants.gov is going to be substantial. They are also gearing up for volume but he said eRA is unsure of their response time.

Oct/Nov receipt dates—Jennifer noted that despite scaling back the initial target of eCGAP applications for Oct/Nov, eRA had suggested to the Service Providers that they try to at least double the previous numbers. The issue of NIH giving electronic applicants an incentive of ten days extra to submit over paper is still under review. Jennifer said the plan is to offer the consortia capability in full budgets for those receipt dates; however, it will hinge on the development timing.

Update on Grants.gov and 424RR Transition

JJ Maurer and Jennifer Flach

JJ noted that eRA is in the process of refining the software for the process of retrieving the 424RR applications from Grants.gov and displaying the image in the Commons. While a substantial amount of work has been completed, the software needs to be tested to ensure it is stable, reliable and complete. eRA has not yet completed the portion that integrates the Service Providers to Grants.gov; that analysis is ongoing.

Site identifier needed— JJ noted that one issue after eRA retrieves applications from Grants.gov is — how does eRA send a message back to the Service Provider when there is no indication from which site a Service Provider sent the application or which Service Provider sent the application? eRA has to check the affiliation or the DUNS number to find out, but the information is not easily deduced. Often a DUNS number may be associated with multiple installations of software. While such a check can be done for SBIR/STTR applications, it could be problematic with large scale applications. JJ suggested that ideally there should be an identifier (not the DUNS number) in the application itself regarding the site it came from or the trading partner; otherwise, the Service Providers will have to inform eRA about the applications they have sent through Grants.gov. JJ noted that this issue could also be problematic sooner or later for other agencies working via Grants.gov, who need to send some message back.

Action: (JJ Maurer) Suggest to Grants.gov that there be a site identifier in the 424RR application indicating from where the application was sent

Specific milestones—Jennifer and JJ noted that upper management is being urged to support specific milestones for electronic receipt as a way of giving all stakeholders a predictable horizon. Outlining a specific plan would be advantageous to eRA, NIH and Service Providers.

Notice of Grant Award— Jennifer noted that incorporating an electronic Notice of Grant Award is a priority. Sending a NGA out to a Service Provider will give SPs more marketability. It will also help SPs provide customers with an integrated product for grants management from tracking an award to managing expenditures on awards to submitting progress reports.

PIs/SOs need separate registration—Tom Tatham noted that one issue that should be communicated to Principal Investigators and Signing Officials is that each needs to have a separate account in Commons. For instance, an SO cannot access Summary Statements and Priority Scores. He noted that with small businesses, PIs are frequently SOs for their organization and therefore this issue needs to be communicated to the SBIR/STTR community. Janna Wehrle noted that a banner on the Commons webpage urging two separate accounts for the SO/PI would cut down on the problem. JJ noted that down the road, the Single Sign On that eRA plans to implement will take care of this issue.

Action: (Communications office) Communicate to SBIR/STTR community that PIs and SOs need to have separate accounts in Commons

PureEdge Mac compatibility—Tom Tatham asked about the concerns regarding compatibility of Macintosh with Grants.gov's PureEdge software. Jennifer noted that IBM had last month announced that it had reached an agreement to purchase PureEdge Solutions Inc.. She did not know what the ramifications of this purchase were and whether it would translate into more resources to speed up the Macintosh compatibility process given IBM's heft. Jennifer noted that Grants.gov also offers PC emulation software to Macintosh users. She noted that CIT has agreed to keep the Citrix server running, as it had done for the Pioneer Awards submission last year, to enable Macintosh users to submit their applications to NIH via Grants.gov.

AIDS grant applications—Jennifer noted that the R13 conference grants were the next mechanism likely to be required to come in to NIH via Grants.gov. R13 grants have a receipt date of Dec. 15. All AIDS related grant applications (regardless of the type) are typically about a month later (a receipt date of Jan. 2, for instance, compared to Dec. 1 for SBIR/STTRs). Jennifer asked if a separate announcement needs to be set up with a different closing date for AIDS related grant applications. Sara Silver noted that AIDS grant applications are self-identified (based on the RFA/PA); however, they do need to be flagged in the system.

Action: (Sara Silver) Add to requirements that AIDS related grant applications need to be flagged in the system.

Table Talk

Print on demand—Suzanne Fisher noted that for the Oct. 1 receipt date, each study section will get four color copies of each electronic grant application, as is the usual practice. However, the responsibility for printing will not fall to her office – the Division of Receipt and Referral –but will be done elsewhere in the Center for Scientific Review.

For the Dec. 1 receipt date, CSR plans to institute ‘print on demand,’ meaning that any reviewer who does not have a conflict with an application can request a copy from a centralized place. CSR is in talks with NIH’s Office of Research Services to provide this service. Sara Silver noted that the capability for reviewers to use the Internet Assisted Review module to print on demand should be added to the list of features planned for IAR.

Action: (Sara Silver) Find out from Daniel Fox whether the capability for reviewers to use the IAR to print on demand is on the list of planned IAR enhancements

Bookmark or not — Sara Silver asked the group whether the list of publications and the inclusion enrolment report should be bookmarked or not. The group suggested that it would be advantageous to bookmark the two for the ease of reviewers and to facilitate text mining. They also felt that the list and the report should appear separately on the Table of Contents.

Action: (Sara Silver) Add to requirements that List of Publications and Inclusion Enrolment Report pages should be bookmarked and listed separately in the Table of Contents.

NIH Guide Notice for Dec. 1—Jennifer said she would find out the status of the NIH Guide Notice being prepared for the Dec. 1 SBIR/STTR receipt date.

Action: (Jennifer) Find out the status of the NIH Guide Notice for the Dec. 1 receipt date.

Review Action Items from July 18 meeting

1. (Sara Silver, Richard Panniers) Send one electronic and one paper application respectively with only detailed budget information to Amy Swain for testing.
Clarification sought before sending.
2. (Amy Swain) Arrange for technical meeting next week between eCGAP Team and Service Providers. *Done.*
3. (Tom Tatham) Find out status of CSR analysis into ‘print on demand.’ *Tom reported that CSR’s analysis is at an early conceptual stage.*

4. (Amy Swain) Contact Jo Anne Goodnight about SBIR printing issue. *The issue has been decided. The plan is to have 'print on demand' for applications received for the Dec. 1 receipt date.*
5. (JJ Maurer) Convey to eRA management the need for a NIH Guide Notice for electronic submission on Oct/Nov receipt dates. *This has to wait until it has been decided whether an incentive of extra time can be offered to those who submit electronically.*
6. (David Wright) Find out from Grants.gov their experience in handling increased volume of applications. *Jennifer will check if slides from the last Grants.gov Stakeholders' meeting are available online because some information regarding volume handling was detailed at that meeting.*
7. (Sara Silver) Check to see if items listed in sample Master Conflict of Interest List are collected in IMPAC II and inform David George and Richard Panniers. *To be done.*

Attendees

Dixon, Diana (OD)	Maurer, JJ (IBM/Ekagra/OD)	Stallone, Don (RSIS/OD)
Fisher, Suzanne (CSR)	Panniers, Richard (CSR)	Subramanya, Manju (LTS/OD)
Flach, Jennifer (OD)	Silver, Sara (IBM/Z-Tech Corp./OER)	Tatham, Tom (CSR)
Goodman, Michael (OD)		Wehrle, Janna (NIGMS)
Liberman, Ellen (NEI)		